Mother For John Philip

By Harriet G. Canfield

John Philip Brown sat up very straight at his end of the breakfast table. Mrs. Rachel Noah, at the other end, could not see his little bare feet playing tag beneath the table.

"Aunt Rachel looks just like my chicken hawk—anyways she would if he wore spit curls," he said to himself, with a little chuckle. "I bet"— But John Philip's bet was never recorded, for Susan appeared just then, red and giggling.

Mrs. Noah stared at her reprovingly. "I did not ring," she said sternly.

"No'm, I know you didn't, but she—she's here, an' "—

"'She?' Take your apron down from your mouth and talk connectedly. Who is here?'

"Columbia — Columbia Farley. She says that's her name, ma'am, an' she's from the Orphans' home—a little mite of a thing, an' that funny!" Here Susan retired again behind her apron.

"What does she want?" Mrs. Noah asked grimly.

"Well, ma'am," Susan exploded, "she wants to stay!"

"Stay?" her mistress repeated blankly, while John Philip, unreproved, squirmed with delight. Here was something doing at last.

"Yes'm," Susan went on, "She's had her eye on this house, she says, for a long time, but it wa'n't till this mornin' that she decided she'd live with you. She's a-settin' on her satchel out in the kitchen."

Mrs. Noah fairly snorted with astonishment and indignation. "Much obliged to her, I'm sure," she said sarcastically, "and may I ask what decided her in our favor?"

"It was John Philip, ma'am," Susan said, choking with laughter. "She—she says she wants to be a mother to him."

John Philip's face matched his hair in color now; even the freckles took on a livelier red. "Consarn her!" he said under his breath.

"Any more?" his aunt asked, with the air of one prepared for the worst.

"Yes'm; she asked what your name was, an' when I said 'Mrs. Noah' she was that surprised. She said she'd heard about you an' Mr. Noah at Sunday school, but she had no idee you was livin' yet."

"Anything more? My oatmeal is getting cold. Don't stand there giggling like an idiot."

"She wondered how old you was, ma'am, an' when I said I didn't know she thought she could tell by lookin' at your teeth, like the hired man at the home done when he bought a horse."

A great wave of color rolled over Mrs. Noah's face and broke on the beach of "spit curls" outlining her high forehead. "Bring her in," she said, closing her thin lips tightly over her "store" teeth.

Susan disappeared and a moment later ushered "Columbia Farley" into the august presence of her mistress. She was truly "a mite of a thing," with great dark eyes and a most engaging smile.

"How do you do, Mrs. Noah?" she said, holding out her hand in a quaint, old fashioned way. To John Philip's surprise, his aunt took the little hand in hers.

"So you'd like to live here?" she said not unkindly.

"Yes, awful well. Don't you need me?" she asked naively.

"I think not," Mrs. Noah said, very gently for her, "and, besides, I couldn't take you without the consent of the matron at the home."

"Oh, she won't care!" the little girl exclaimed eagerly. "There's too many of us now and"—

"Well," Mrs. Noah interrupted, "you can stay to breakfast, and then I'll go with you to the home." The child had crept thus quickly into a warm corner of the grim lady's heart.

She was eating her oatmeal when John Philip's father came down to breakfast and asked so kindly, "Whose little girl is this?" that Columbia's heart went out to him then and there.

"I don't know," she said simply in reply to his question. "They ain't found out yet at the home, but I know how old I am. I'm going on seven. I'm little, but maybe I'd do for him" —she nodded cheerily at John Philip— "till he got a really, truly one."

"A really, truly what?" Mr. Brown asked smilingly.

"Why, a mother, of course. I learned how to be one from Mis' Jones. She has eight children. She lives near the home. You just help 'em be good, and they will, 'cause you love 'em so. It's awful nice to have a mother," she said wistfully. "I asked Tommy Jones if he didn't think so, and he said, 'Sure thing!'"

John Philip tried to scowl, but his forehead refused to pucker, and when his father said, "Shall we let her adopt you, son?", he laughed outright. "We—we—might give her a try," he stammered.

And so it happened that Columbia Farley entered the Brown family "on probation" and later was taken into "full membership."

It was on a Saturday morning, a month or more after Columbia had been received into full membership, that the children were playing together in the garden.

"I guess I'll go wadin' this afternoon," John Philip announced. "Aunt Rachel would just worry if I told her, and daddy won't be home for lunch, so I can't ask him."

"I'm 'fraid you'll be drown-ded, dear," the little mother said anxiously (John Philip did not object to "dearing" in private), "an' I don't believe you'd better go."

"Pooh!" John Philip rejoined. "You ain't my mother. I ain't had a mother since I was born."

"No," she sighed, "if you had a really truly one I guess you'd have to mind. Your father might get you one."

John Philip grinned. "He's too busy," he said, "but I know one I'd like to get. Last summer we was down at Cove inlet three weeks—daddy an' me—an' there was a jolly nice girl there, an' we liked her awful well—daddy an' me—an' we took her picture one day—snapshot—I mean daddy did. He's got it yet. Come up to his room, and I'll hunt for it."

The children fled into the house and up to Mr. Brown's sitting room. Behind a tall vase John Philip found the object of his search. For a moment Columbia gazed at it with wondering eyes. "Why, it's her!" she shouted, with more force than grammar. "It's my Miss Curtis! She lives near the home. 'Course she's awful nice!" She gazed long and lovingly at the picture. "Say," she said at last, "s'pose we get her for your mother?"

Thereupon followed a discussion of ways and means, and it was not until after luncheon that the committee of two set forth in quest of a mother for John Philip. It was a very startled and amazed young lady who listened to their plea. It was Columbia who offered the most persuasive argument.

"He hasn't anybody but his Aunt Rachel and his father," she said pleadingly, "an' he keeps your picture back of a vase, an' "—

"Who keeps my picture?" Miss Curtis interrupted, her sweet face flushing a rose red.

"Why, John Philip's father," Columbia explained. "I s'pose you didn't know 'bout it then?"

"No, I didn't know," she said. "I didn't know," she repeated to herself again and again.

"Now you know, an' won't you come, please?" It was John Philip who pleaded now. Miss Curtis stooped and took his freckled little face between her slender white hands. "I'll think of it, dear," she promised, "but it will be better not to mention your —your proposal to your father."

John Philip did not agree with her, and that very evening he broke the news to his unsuspecting father. Columbia, with rare delicacy, had declined to be present.

"Daddy" John Philip said bluntly, "I asked her—Columbia an' me."

Philip Brown looked up from his paper. He was a fine specimen of manhood—strong of body and mind, clean of heart and still on "the sunny side" of forty.

"Asked whom?" he said. "Asked what?"

"Miss Curtis, you know. I—I asked her to be my mother."

Philip Brown sat up very straight and stared at his small son and heir.

"Don't you want her?" the little fellow said, struggling manfully to keep back the tears. "I said I was sure you wanted her, same as I did."

"What did she say?" The question came from between white lips.

"She didn't know you had her picture till Columbia told her. She said she'd think about it, but I'd better not tell you I'd asked her to"—

But John Philip was talking to the empty air. His father was out of the room before the last sentence was finished. He had seized his hat and vanished.

"Gee," John Philip said to himself, "we've done it now, I guess—Columbia an' me!"

They had. The bride and groom said so on their wedding day. John Philip's father had suggested that the orchestra play "Hail Columbia" while the knot was being tied, but, strange to say, the bride elect objected.

A Thoughtful Beggar.

J. Stanley Todd, the portrait painter, was talking about the beggars of different lands. "I have met," said Mr. Todd, "beggars of every description—shy beggars, blustering ones, old beggars, robust ones—but the most remarkable beggar of the lot was a man whom I never met, yet whom I never assuredly will forget. All I saw of this beggar was his hat and his chair. The chair stood on a corner of the Rue St. Lazare in Paris. The hat lay on the chair, with a few coppers in it, and behind the hat was a placard reading, 'Please don't forget the beggar, who is now taking his luncheon.'"

A Humble Apology.

Conversation overheard in a London street; scene, laborer working on a scaffold, contemplating surrounding view, when his foreman comes along down below and, looking up and seeing him idle, calls out to him: "So yer 'aving a look round! What do yer think of the weather?" Workman (looking down with contempt)—Noa; I'm a-working! Foreman—Oh, I beg yer pardon! I'm sorry I stopped yer!—London Globe.

What Tact Is.

What we call tact is the ability to find before it is too late what it is that our friends do not desire to learn from us. It is the art of withholding on proper occasions information which we are quite sure would be good for them. —S. M. Crothers.

Etiquette.

Anxious writes, "What are the duties of a father at his daughter's 'coming out' party?" To put up and shut up.—New York Herald.

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